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SUBJECT: GOM Explains Decision on 7th Troop Rotation to Iraq

Ulaanbaatar 550 (NOTAL - Available via SIPDIS)

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¶1. (U) Summary: In a July 20 meeting, the Foreign Minister reiterated to Ambassador the Mongolian government's support for the war on terrorism and its commitment to remain a member of the coalitions in Iraq and Afghanistan. He said that there had been no opposition in the Cabinet to a seventh rotation of troops to Iraq, but that technical and financial factors -- limited numbers of trained troops and peacekeeping obligations elsewhere -- had required Mongolia to reduce its commitment to Iraq to a few officers, with the details yet to be determined. The Ambassador urged Mongolia to consider a press release to correct any impression it was withdrawing completely, as an erroneous newspaper account the day before had reported. Embassy provides draft press guidance in para 9. End summary.

¶2. (U) Reftel reported GOM's decision to send a seventh rotation of soldiers to Iraq, consisting of a "small number of command staff officers." The sixth rotation, whose tour is up in September, consists of 100 soldiers, serving under Polish command in Camp Echo, performing force protection duties.

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador met with Foreign Minister Enkhbold on July 20. She had wanted to meet with the Foreign Minister to be able to accurately describe to Washington the Mongolian decision and the factors that went into it. She noted she was without instructions, but stated that she expected Washington would welcome Mongolia's decision to send a seventh rotation of troops to Iraq, albeit at a reduced level. She expressed regret, however, about the way that the U.S. had been informed of the decision - nearly two weeks after the July 7 Cabinet decision had been taken and only after an erroneous report in a newspaper on July 19 that Mongolia intended to completely withdraw its military forces from Iraq. She noted that the influx of high level visitors and government closure for a week during Naadam (July 10-14) had understandably preoccupied the GOM, but that given the spirit of our comprehensive partnership and the importance the U.S. places on the global war on terrorism, it would have

been preferable for the GOM to respond to our request and to inform us, even informally, sooner after the decision was taken.

¶4. (SBU) The Foreign Minister replied that Washington should be informed that Mongolia is very interested in building relations and was taking concrete actions to demonstrate this. The newspaper story had also surprised his government, he said, expressing regret about the delay in notifying the U.S. of the July 7 Cabinet decision. He noted that Mongolia had faced an unprecedented influx of foreign delegations during the July 10-14 Naadam holiday, but acknowledged that the government should have at least informally communicated its decision earlier.

¶5. (SBU) The Foreign Minister stated that Mongolia remains committed to the joint fight against international terrorism, and supports operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the July 7 Cabinet meeting, the seventh rotation of troops to Iraq had been approved in principle, although many details remain to be worked out about the number of officers to be sent and their role. Enkhbold said he hopes the U.S. understands the decision, which was undertaken purely for technical and financial reasons. He said that Mongolia had needed its few trained peacekeeping soldiers for other deployments, and specifically noted Mongolia's commitment of 250 troops to the UN war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone. However, he reiterated, Mongolia remains committed to the war against terrorism and to the Coalition in Iraq.

¶6. (SBU) In response to the Ambassador's question

whether there had been any opposition to another deployment on political grounds, Enkhbold replied that there had not been. However, he said, such opposition might arise in the future, especially due to concern about risks faced by Mongolian troops. He said he had just received information from the Ministry of Defense that a Mongolian soldier had suffered a concussion two days ago in an attack on the base where they are serving, and that a helicopter carrying senior Polish officers had been shot down.

¶7. (SBU) The Ambassador asked whether and when the GOM might announce its decision to send a seventh rotation. The Foreign Minister responded that the public might be informed once the decision is disseminated throughout the Mongolian government, and once the details of the new deployment are worked out. The Ambassador noted that, because of the erroneous press story, there might be questions raised and suggested that the GOM consider issuing a simple press statement to the effect that, contrary to press reports, the GOM would in fact send a seventh rotation, without going into the details of how many and what role. The Foreign Minister said he would consider this idea. (Note: After the meeting, MFA Director General for the Americas, Middle East and Africa Jambaldorj said that he personally leaned against a press announcement. In the past, Mongolia had not announced decisions to send new deployments, but had given wide publicity when soldiers were sent off. Issuing a press statement, he opined, might attract more bad attention than it would prevent. The Ambassador urged the GOM to consider issuing a simple statement to clear the air, to the effect that contrary to erroneous press reports, the GOM remained committed to the war on terrorism and would send a seventh rotation to Iraq. She noted that the U.S., as a matter of course, would prepare contingency press guidance to that effect and might be willing to issue a statement in tandem with a Mongolian statement to that effect.)

¶8. (SBU) Earlier on July 20, DCM and E/P Chief met with PM's Foreign Policy Advisor Davaasuren and with

MFA Director General Jambaldorj. Jambaldorj stressed that the only factor going into the government's decision was a shortage of peacekeeping soldiers, which had been particularly affected by the deployment of the 250 soldiers in the second rotation to the UN war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone. He added that Mongolia continues to talk to Turkey about a deployment of soldiers to Afghanistan under Turkish command at some point in the future, but said that no government decision has been made yet. Davaasuren added that, whenever the subject had come up, Prime Minister Enkhbold had always been a strong supporter of continuing Mongolia's military commitment in Iraq.

¶9. (SBU) The following is the text of proposed press guidance, which Washington might use if a question is asked about Mongolia's decision, or that we may issue here after a GOM press announcement of its decision on the seventh rotation:

Begin text

The U.S. Government welcomes the Mongolian government's continued commitment to the people of Iraq as reflected in its decision to send a seventh rotation of military personnel to Iraq. Mongolia's participation in international operations in Iraq and Afghanistan since 2003 has supported reconstruction and peacekeeping efforts in those nations and made an important contribution to the global war against terrorism. We are pleased this contribution will continue.

Experience gained through deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan have enhanced the capacity of Mongolia's Armed Forces to participate in international peacekeeping operations elsewhere, including in Sierra Leone and Kosovo. These deployments also demonstrate the success of cooperation between Mongolia and the United States aimed at increasing the capability of the Mongolian Armed Forces to take part in peacekeeping operations around the world.

End text

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